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INTELL again slants Convention Center coverage

The *Intelligencer Journal* / *New Era* editors are not yet permitted to divorce news coverage from the financial interests of its publisher. A case in point is a front page article_“**Extension likely for convention center debt.**”

The casual reader would infer that Commissioner Scott Martin’s proposal only dealt with renegotiating Wells Fargo Bank’s interest rates for the Convention Center bonds. In fact, the Martin proposal contemplates contributions on the part of the Lancaster Newspapers, Inc., partners in the Marriott Hotel, through modification of Penn Square Partner’s one sided financial arrangements with the Convention Center Authority.

LNP’s conflict of interest is not even acknowledged in the article.

Moreover, after several paragraphs ballyhooing the Convention Center, we read about Lancaster City Mayor Rick Gray’s proposal for the county to inflict even more taxes on countywide hotels, the vast majority of which have derived no benefits from the Convention Center and now compete with the Marriott Hotel. Not a word is mentioned about the \$100,000 that Martin had asked the City to annually contribute since it is the guarantor of the downtown Marriott’s financing.

To truly honor our fallen soldiers

AOL: “*This Memorial Day, take some time to recognize and remember our fallen heroes, and the brave men and women who keep our country safe every day.*”

NEWSLANC: Most soldiers endangered their lives because they felt they were fighting in a just cause. However, all too often our nation’s youths have been sacrificed for questionable wars.

So let us not just honor the fallen on Memorial Day, but let us also hold responsible those who

recklessly, foolishly and often for profit, put our military ‘in harm’s way’.

Getting killed doesn’t necessarily make a soldier a hero. In unjust wars, it does make them victims... along with those they are made to kill.

Do we call them “*heroes*” because it helps mask our shame for having so carelessly sent so many of our youths to their deaths?

A more sensible way to acquire the Harrisburg Incinerator

Moody’s Investment Service threatened to significantly downgrade the Lancaster County Solid Waste Management Authority’s credit rating if it acquires the long trouble plagued and

environmentally compromised Harrisburg Incinerator.

Below are the problems facing **LCSWMA** and our proposed alternative:

- 1) LCSWMA's original evaluation and offer was \$45 million but now its outlay would come about \$150 million, not because of economic factors but at the demand of Dauphin County. There apparently is no third party expert feasibility study to determine price.
- 2) **LCSWMA** is gambling its entire net worth of approximately \$150 million in the acquisition costs. Moreover, LCSWMA's total annual cash flow of approximately \$6 million could readily be absorbed by a continuation of Incinerator losses. The Lancaster County public would have to make up any losses in higher trash removal prices.
- 3) The Harrisburg Incinerator has been plagued with break downs over the decades, the latest taking place just a year ago. LCSWMA cites the operator, Covanta, as stating the incinerator is in good condition. But Covanta stands to collect \$20 million if the \$150 million acquisition takes place. Also, no supportive third party engineering study has been made public.
- 4) For years the City of Harrisburg and later its Authority were illegally processing hazardous waste. The residue is stored in 'mountains' of ash on site.

The Harrisburg Patriot presciently wrote in 1989: "There is ... no visible effort on the horizon likely to address the ash problem in the foreseeable future... Rather, city officials seem to be stalling for time, hoping for an act of God or a buyer to take the incinerator and its ash problems off its hands." "The city, for all the money it has put into the incinerator operations, has permitted it to turn into a financial and environmental time bomb."

- 5) In 2000, the regional EPA administrator wrote the state DEP that, *there is no doubt that (the Harrisburg incinerator) is one of, and perhaps, the most significant single source of dioxins/furans in the United States.*"
- 6) Officials have made clear that subsequent owners would be liable for any environmental cleanup required of the site now and in the future.

So what would be a sensible arrangement?

The current deal seems to be an attempt to bail out the City of Harrisburg's and Dauphin County's \$350 million in Incinerator debt at the expense of Lancaster, rather than a normal business proposition based on sound economic considerations.

It would be far less risky to enter into a forty year lease, perhaps with an initial payment of \$50 million, and split profits evenly between the Harrisburg and Lancaster Authorities.

The Harrisburg Authority could raise funds towards paying off its debt by pledging the lease as

collateral for a bond sale. The Lancaster Authority would not risk choking on a \$150 million 'turkey.'

The lease should include adjoining vacant ground, but not any area currently containing potentially hazardous ash heaps.

Negotiations should be placed on hold, all engineering and feasibility reports should be published (if they indeed exist), and the public should be given the opportunity to attend briefings, ask questions, and have its voice heard.

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